

October 2017

# Conscription Crisis: The Role of the Church

End Conscription Campaign Churches' Subgroup

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.colum.edu/ecc>



Part of the [African History Commons](#), and the [Military History Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

End Conscription Campaign Churches' Subgroup, "Conscription Crisis: The Role of the Church" (2017). *End Conscription Campaign*.  
4.  
<http://digitalcommons.colum.edu/ecc/4>

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Orlando Redekopp Collection at Digital Commons @ Columbia College Chicago. It has been accepted for inclusion in End Conscription Campaign by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Columbia College Chicago.

# **CONSCRIPTION CRISIS**

The role of the Church



# Conscription crisis

## — The role of the Church

In this difficult and challenging time in South Africa, perhaps one of the most difficult situations confronting young white men is the question of compulsory military service in the SADF. Many young conscripts are faced with a crisis of conscience as they appear to have no choice in this matter. As Christians within the E.C.C. we see the need for the Church to be actively involved in helping to resolve this crisis.

### What does the law say about objectors to military service?

The 1983 Defence Amendment Act makes provision for the recognition of *bona fide* religious pacifists, whose credentials are tested by the Board for Religious Objection which was set up by the Act. The Board, chaired by a judge, includes theologians and military personnel. Applicants can apply for non-combatant service within the SADF, or, if they totally reject the idea of serving in "any armed force", the Board can refer them to the Department of Manpower for non-military service in a government department or local authority, for a maximum period of six years (i.e. one and a half times as much as the total military commitment required from national servicemen).

### What's wrong with this system?

The existing law fails to accommodate conscientious objectors who are not religious pacifists. Many Christians who are

not pacifists are unwilling to serve in the SADF, on the grounds that they will be defending the apartheid system either on the borders or in the townships, and that this is in conflict with their religious convictions. Other young men have genuine moral objections to war, although they have no religious affiliations. The Board for Religious Objection cannot cater for these people at all.

The provisions for community service are too narrow, and we believe that other alternatives should be allowed, such as nursing and teaching in non-government institutions, church-supervised youth or rural development work, non-professional work for registered welfare organisations, and many more.





## What can we do as Christians?

Most major denominations have passed important resolutions about the shortcomings of the present system, including the composition and terms of reference of the Board for Religious Objection. Individual Christians or study groups can begin by studying these resolutions and encouraging action at local church level; for without the involvement of local congregations, such resolutions are worthless and soon forgotten.

Church youth groups and confirmation classes provide an ideal opportunity for discussing the issues of violence and military conscription and the role of the SADF. These are vital issues for young Christians, and perhaps we in the churches have been shirking our responsibility to offer young people the opportunity to work out their own position about military service, in the light of a Christian conscience.

Local congregations or parishes can press their denominational leaders to make it a priority to work for a change in the law to rectify the current inadequacies.

You may wish to become actively involved in the E.C.C. in your region.

Let's be honest. Conscription is an issue that affects us all, and one that is becoming increasingly painful in the face of the polarisation of our society. The End Conscription Campaign is eager to work with the churches to help them implement these suggestions.

Contact:

**We call for an end  
to conscription**

**We call for a just peace  
in our land**



Issued by: E.C.C. Churches' Subgroup